

Bluebirds: habitat basics

Head and shoulders
Photo of DC or
Soil Conservationist
here

By _____,
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Bright blue in color, melodious in song, the eastern bluebird is a welcome visitor to backyards across much of the United States. Bluebird populations blossomed when the frontier was settled and forests were cut to establish small fields and pastures. They were helped more by the hundreds of thousands of wooden fence posts used for new field boundaries. But more recent increasing pesticide use, the introduction of the European starling and the English house sparrow, replacement of wooden posts with steel, and clearing of fence rows hurt bluebirds. Most recently, thousands of concerned people have put up bluebird houses in an ongoing recovery effort to ensure a future for the bluebird. Nesting from southern Canada to the southern U.S. border, and from the Rocky Mountains to the east coast, the bluebird migrates to winter habitat in the middle parts of eastern North America south into Mexico, the Gulf coast, and southern Florida.

Food preferences: Two-thirds of the bluebird's diet is insects and other invertebrates; the remainder is wild fruits. Insects, include grasshoppers, crickets, katydids, beetles, earthworms, spiders, centipedes, and sow bugs. Fruits especially useful for winter food,

when insects are scarce, are wild grape, dogwood, hawthorn, and sumac and hackberry seeds.

Cover. Grassy areas with scattered hardwoods, including meadows, grazed pastures, yards, roadsides and grassed farmlands are ideal habitat. Mowed areas including golf courses, large lawns, and rights of way are also well used. Open grasses provide foraging habitat; scattered trees or fence posts offer the perches bluebirds use to spot and then swoop down on insects on or near the ground.

Nesting. The eastern bluebird is a cavity-nesting bird, but cannot make its own cavity. It relies on abandoned woodpecker cavities, open tops of rotted out stumps, and holes in wooden fence posts. Manmade wooden boxes are also readily accepted if they are designed and installed correctly. Nest boxes can be used to augment natural cavities in grassy areas that lack snags or natural cavities.

For more information, stop at our office at _____ (Number) _____ (Street) in _____ (city) , or visit the NRCS website at www.nrcs.usda.gov Or, visit the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Management Institute at www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov Also, visit the North American Bluebird Society website at www.nabluebirdsociety.org



Bluebird recovery has been helped by concerned people who have put up hundreds of thousands of bluebird houses.

Wildlife Ways Did you know....



Some people say bluebird blue is "the most vivid" and the bluebird warble is "the most charming." Their reputation is as a "sweet" bird, but males and females fight among themselves, and sometimes kill each other over mates and nest sites.